

Becker, Brian W.; Macdonald, Heather (2017) Does psychology “matter”? An analysis of “relevance” in South African psychology. *PsycCRITIQUES*, Vol 62(6), 2017, No Pagination Specified. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0040725>

Reviews the book, *A History of “Relevance” in Psychology* by Wahbie Long (see record 2016-10064-000). The book details the hidden polysemy of “relevance” in the history of psychological discourse within South African society. Long's central argument is that “relevance” is not some abstract, universal ideal but is defined only within the historical, social, cultural contexts in which this discourse occurs. To develop his argument, Long employs critical discursive analysis of speeches delivered by previous presidents of psychological associations in South Africa. This qualitative method examines the intersections of tradition, history and power through specific ethnographic descriptions to demonstrate the mutually influential relationship between discourse and its context. This method is “epistemologically relativist and ontological realist” in that real, material conditions shape the development of ideas, yet understanding itself is an interpretative process contingent upon the shifting nature of our material (i.e., social, political) world. Although Long claims that this method denies any a priori values, aligning with its epistemological relativism, critical discursive analysis seems imbued with assumptions and judgments that make implicit claims about how psychologists ought to define its terms (e.g., liberation from hegemonic power structures). Long’s meticulous examination of speeches and the surrounding South African political context requires patience, yet the reader is rewarded with a clear demonstration of the potential insights yielded from critical discursive analysis and a convincing call to explore the larger historical and cultural context that shapes psychological theories and practice. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2017 APA, all rights reserved)